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Critics'

Week of
November 30, 1942

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Yankee Point" opened Monday, November 23rd, at the Longacre Theatre.
†"Counsellor-at-Law" opened Tuesday, November 24th, at the Royale Theatre.
†"The Pirate" opened Wednesday, November 25th, at the Martin Beck Theatre.
†"The Great Big Doorstep" opened Thursday, November 26th, at the Morosco Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"The Great Big Doorstep"

NEW YORK TIMES
November 27, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Great Big Doorstep"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FROM E. P. O'Donnell's novel, the writing Hacketts — Albert and Frances Goodrich—have fashioned an engaging comedy called "The Great Big Doorstep," which Herman Shumlin put on to much laughter last evening at the Morosco. Give the Hacketts a good idea and they are worrying it like terriers, and give Mr. Shumlin one and he is among the most thorough directors in the business. And if any one this morning should be asking the Hacketts how their second and third acts are, they are often hilarious, through the combination of adaptors and director, plus, of course, a cast that is nothing to get angry about either. Of a slow first act let nothing be said.

The idea of the play is magnificent. One day there came floating down the Mississippi into the 'Cajun country of Louisiana a great big doorstep. This was fished out by the Crochet family and set before the rickety shanty in which its members live. The Crochets are not those who can lightly take such a splendid doorstep and they seek betterment in the form of a house worthy of being set upon such a beautiful step. The house next door is such a house and it is being sold for taxes, so the Crochets in all their diversity of whims and reasons go about getting it.

And the reasons are divers. First of all comes the Commodore, who was a ferry pilot until he went to sleep one night when his ship was loaded with mules; they have not caught all of them yet. Knives constantly are being twisted in the soul of the Commodore. His hand-me-down derby, which is practically as splendid as the doorstep, keeps getting ants in its lining unless he hangs it in the oven, and he can't do that because cooking goes on spasmodically at the Crochets'. With his eye on the property next door, which he doesn't own, he buys grass seed with money he doesn't have in order to feed the horse he will get only when they move in. In a depressed state he is mournful: "I was a failure on the river and a failure on the WPA."

Mrs. Crochet is for the family, which she hopes to hold together only by getting a larger house on which to set the great big doorstep and so house them worthily. She is prayerful and practical; she goes to church and she saves coppers to take the entire family to the movies on bank night, when its seven members will be certain to outnumber every one else and so be sure of a prize. One of the daughters wants to go to New Orleans and work in Woolworth's and the other, at 14, cannot decide between life in a convent and marriage. The big moment of the Crochet day is noon, when the Creole Cafeteria in N'Orleans is broadcasting "what they are eating there today." The Crochet radio batteries are saved for that.

Louis Calhern plays the Commodore, and it is pretty clear that for a long, long time he was a traveling Mr. Day of "Life With Father" and from it has retained the roar which goes as well among the Cajuns as it did in the Day household of old New York. He is a gigantic man, and when his soul is hurt every quarter mile of him writhes in desperate agony; such reminders as that the old pilot now is digging ditches bring him twisting to the ground. Mr. Calhern probably would have been all right as Jeeter Lester, too, for the role does have its phases of "Tobacco Road."

Dorothy Gish is Mrs. Crochet, the practical lady who well knows her husband and is less interested in his manifold woes than in keeping her children together. She is excellent, with both a wry humor and a tenderness, and it is easy to see that if any one can get the family a new house she will do it. Clay Clement has the role of the Commodore's brother, who is a pilot, is interested in a girls' softball baseball team and tosses the funny papers to the Crochet children when his boat passes the bank. He is fine in the second act scene in which he appears. Joy Geffen and Jeanne Perkins Smith are the two daughters; Dickie Monahan and Gerald Matthews, the two younger sons. Howard Bay designed the colorful setting, plus the magnificent great big doorstep.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
November 27, 1942

Gish, Calhern Star in 'Great Big Doorstep'

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE even the most thoughtful and fastidious producer may be lured into strange paths by phantom play scripts there is no point in blaming Herman Shumlin too much for "The Great Big Doorstep" at the Morosco last night. Plainly it is a play which tempted him against his better judgment and led him astray. It is to his credit that he backed his opinion with an unstinting production, one elaborate setting by Howard Bay, and the acting services of Dorothy Gish and Louis Calhern. Unfortunately it is not enough. There is not enough life in the comedy by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett to keep more than a few stray passages from anemic collapse.

This is too bad, not only because Mr. Shumlin's trade-mark is usually a guarantee of substantial drama, but because the play's idea does suggest possibilities. The authors have taken a novel by E. P. O'Donnell about a shiftless family in the "Cajun" country of Louisiana and wrought out of it a sort of pious "Tobacco Road," with a suggestion of "Juno and the Paycock," minus the tragic ending and minus the O'Casey sting.

What is left is an amiable and now and then mildly amusing but mostly tedious picture of the Crochet family—Papa, a dreamy loafer who admits that he was a failure even on the W. P. A., Mama a devout drudge who is forever falling for his dreams of grandeur, and an assortment of Crochet youngsters.

Amusing Picture

The particular dream which provides both the title and the plot is to get a house that will fit a splendid doorstep which the bounteous Mississippi deposited on the Crochet premises. It is a noble stairway ripped from some great facade, and the Crochets use it in front of their shack in the vague hope that some day they will have a house to go with it. They get it when Mama sells a field of illicit and almost accidental lilies.

There is a gentle irony in the tale to sharpen the whimsy a little. There are a few fugitive comments on the slim human chances people put faith in, and an indulgent humor for the curious pride and quiet compromise of people who go through life fooling themselves. But that is about the best face that can be put on it.

Rich Touches

For on the other side of the ledger the play is exasperatingly garrulous, and in spite of its best efforts, quietly conscious of its folksy quaintness. To illuminate the already obvious bluster and empty foolishness of Papa Crochet it will make a mountainous scene out of a molehill of incident. For long stretches it seems to talk just to hear the odd sound of its own dialogue.

Though Mr. Calhern has proved his special comic gifts in "Life With Father," he seems baffled and uneasy by the bloated pomposity of a touselled though derbied derelict. As the forlorn wife and mother Miss Gish has the privilege of sharp comment and patient tenderness, and she molds these meanings firmly and with rich and compassionate comedy touches into a living portrait.

With these and Mr. Bay's handsome settings, and two outstanding sketches of the Crochet girls by Joy Geffen and Jeanne Perkins Smith, Mr. Shumlin has given the play the full benefit of a perceptive production.

There is, in fact, everything on the stage at the Morosco except a reason for doing it at all.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 27, 1942

The Doorstep That Became a House

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE are a number of pleasant things to say about *The Great Big Doorstep*. A comedy about a Cajun household in Louisiana, it introduces something refreshing in the way of regional lineups. There is a nice warm feeling about it all, and in many spots a remarkably winning humor. Mr. Shumlin has staged it with great sympathy and skill, and Dorothy Gish and Louis Calhern are altogether right in the principal roles. But for all its good points, *The Great Big Doorstep* simply doesn't add up to a full evening's entertainment.

Perhaps the explanation is simple. *The Great Big Doorstep* is picturesque rather than dramatic. Telling of a poor family headed by a shiftless, Micawberish father, its very humor derives from the family's static circumstances; its very humor, in other words, puts a penalty on dramatic action. If the characters were unusually eccentric and robust, or if the humor were deepened by poignancy, all this might not matter—though in that case *The Great Big Doorstep* would be a different kind of play. As it is, *The Great Big Doorstep* creates its light, picturesque, purely surface mood, and sticks to it; it offers nothing really full-blooded in the way of character, it provides nothing subterraneous in the way of life. It's nice fun or nothing.

• • •

What story there is rests on a charming, but very frail, idea. Having pulled a handsome doorstep out of the Mississippi, the Crochet family is fired by the idea of having a proper house to go with it, instead of the crumbling shack in which they live. The play tells of their efforts to get the house, and of their final storybook success. Betweenwhiles, things are enlivened by some very funny lines and by the good-natured bluffing and blustering of the paterfamilias. But betweenwhiles there are also many sagging moments in which the less colorful members of the tribe merely talk, and many draggy moments in which they say once more what they already have said too often.

The play doubtless will be compared to *Tobacco Road*, though the comparison is more obvious than apt—for the Crochets are people in a merely pleasant state of disrepair, for whom, all too palpably, God's still in His Heaven. That's perhaps what's inadequate about them. Beneath the rackiness of the Lesters, which was merely something to exploit, lay a true vitality and social meaning which was something to reach down to. The lack of that in the Crochets burdens them with the sole responsibility of being amusing, and they aren't quite amusing enough.

Miss Goodrich and Mr. Hackett seem to have done a good dramatization. Mr. Shumlin has provided an excellent production. The truth would seem to be that *The Great Big Doorstep* found its best form in the more leisurely medium of the novel.

"The Great Big Doorstep"

NEW YORK POST
November 27, 1942

"The Great Big Doorstep" New Comedy Opens at the Morosco

By WILELLA WALDORF

LOUIS CALHERN and Dorothy Gish, who have been playing Father and Mother Day in "Life With Father" for years both here and on the road, head a different sort of family in "The Great Big Doorstep," the new comedy Herman Shumlin produced last night at the Morosco Theatre.

The Louisiana Crochets are Cajuns. That is to say, descendants of the Acadians immortalized in Longfellow's "Evangeline," who settled at the Mississippi delta long ago after being driven out of what is now Nova Scotia.

Mother Crochet lapses into French now and then, especially when excited, and Father Crochet was once a pilot on a Mississippi tug boat but lost his job because he fell asleep one night and lost a whole load of mules. Father now does a little ditch digging, but prefers to be known as a Drainage Expert, and since he eats more than he works, his digestion always troubles him.

With very little coming in, the Crochets live in a tumble-down shack near the river and pray for the time when somebody will lend them $60 to buy in the more commodious dwelling next door about to be sold off for back taxes. They need a more impressive house to go with the great big doorstep one of the boys found floating in the river and which has graced the Crochet shack ever since, giving the family expansive ideas.

How the Crochets almost, but not quite, get the money to buy in that house, first from an amiable Texan working in the vicinity, then from Uncle Dewey, a river pilot who drinks and then feels sorry for himself, keeps the whole family, as well as the audience at the Morosco, in a fine state of suspense and mounting hysteria as the evening progresses.

"The Great Big Doorstep" starts mildly, but becomes steadily funnier and more beguiling as it goes on. Although neither Mr. Calhern and Miss Gish as Father and Mother Crochet, nor the six Crochet children, manage to seem very French or very Southern, they don't try too hard and their charm as a family grows on you.

By the middle of Act 3 Mr. Shumlin could have sent his stage manager out with a plea to the audience to help get that new house for the Crochets, and collected ten times what they needed in cash to close the deal.

The playwrights, however, arrange things finally so that such a revolutionary step is not necessary. There is actually very little plot knocking around "The Great Big Doorstep" but the Crochets are amusing people to get to know and Mr. Shumlin has given the piece a nice production with some helpful acting by Mr. Calhern, Miss Gish and a good supporting cast.

'THE GREAT BIG DOORSTEP'

A comedy in three acts by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, based on a novel by E. P. O'Donnell; staged by Herman Shumlin; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by Mr. Shumlin at the Morosco Theater on November 26, 1942. The cast:

Evvie Crochet ..... Joy Geffen
Topal Crochet ..... Jeanne Perkins Smith
Mrs. Crochet ..... Dorothy Gish
Gussie Crochet ..... Dickie Monahan
Paul Crochet ..... Gerald Matthews
Arthur Crochet ..... Jack Manning
Mr. Tobin ..... John Morny
Commodore ..... Louis Calhern
Mr. Dupre ..... Nat Burns
Tayo Delacroix ..... Ralph Bell
Dewey Crochet ..... Clay Clement
Beaumont Crochet ..... Morton L. Stevens
Ed ..... Robert Crawley

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 27, 1942

'The Great Big Doorstep' Is a Folk Comedy of the Deep South

"The Great Big Doorstep," comedy by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Produced by Herman Shumlin at the Morosco Theatre, New York, Nov. 26, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE temptation is to classify "The Great Big Doorstep" at the Morosco as a "Tobacco Road" with its face washed. But that doesn't describe the new Frances Goodrich-Albert Hackett comedy quite accurately. "Tobacco Road" was also something of a social tract.

"The Great Big Doorstep" is just a modest folk comedy of the Deep South with no more serious excuse for production than that it will provide one division of the playgoing public with satisfying entertainment.

I think I have never seen good actors work harder to give their play everything they had to give it than Dorothy Gish and Louis Calhern worked last night in their authors' interest.

Their recent success in "Life With Father" naturally stimulated their interest in character comedy. The interest of Mr. Calhern particularly, he having previously been condemned to a long line of roles either heavy or heroic.

Calhern Has a Job

Taking on the role of a superior sort of Jeeter Lester, a "Cajun" of the legendary Arcadian country in Louisiana, he draws it over his impressive frame with an enthusiasm touched with affection.

His hair is touseled, but still combed. His clothes are baggy, but still clean. His gait is shiftless but gracefully alert. He combines a Micawber optimism with Jeeter's disgust for physical effort.

Only one handicap gives him trouble. He is definitely playing out of his social class. The more like "Commodore" Crochet he becomes, the less like Louis Calhern he becomes, the less convincing he must become to his audience.

A similar handicap in "Life With Father" helped him immensely. The more like Father Day he became, the farther he took Calhern into his social class, the more convincing he became to his audience.

Miss Gish has an easier task. She has a sound sense of character and a nice feeling for sentimental drama. Here she is playing the forthright mother of a large and troublesome brood, and loving a hopeless failure of a man who is their father. However artificial the situations into which she is forced, her mother's loyalty proves an effective shield.

That Old Deep South

The Crochet family, of which Miss Gish and Mr. Calhern are the head, is living in a tumbledown shack along the river's bank in Grass Margin, Louisiana. A flood brings them the doorstep of an old Southern mansion. They drag it up, plant it before the shack, scrub it clean and begin to dream of the house they might build around it.

Several times they come within reach of enough money to rent such a house, but each time they are comically, and pathetically, robbed of their opportunity, usually through their father's blundering shiftlessness.

Producer Shumlin has, it seems to me, made one mistake in staging. He has clothed the Crochets too neatly. The girls spend enough on their makeup and their hair-dos to have fed the family for a week.

Here are actors playing parts rather than characters realistically interpreted by actors. The obviousness of the contrast serves to throw the play out of focus.

However, last night's audience laughed a lot and seemed happy. All the actors gave good performances. Howard Bay's setting stood out.

"The Great Big Doorstep" has a public if it can find it.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 27, 1942

Cajun Folk Comedy

By HOWARD BARNES

HERMAN SHUMLIN has found a folk comedy of considerable warmth and humor in "The Great Big Doorstep." As is his wont, he has produced and staged it with acumen and vigor. The result is a show which starts slowly, goes off on innumerable tangents and finally becomes a pleasant character study of a Cajun family in a depressed area of Louisiana. Give credit to smart treatment, rather than original dramatic construction for the essential entertainment that inheres in the new Morosco exhibit.

Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, who adapted the play from an E. P. O'Donnell novel, have an enviable record as scenarists. Perhaps it is their Hollywood background which causes "The Great Big Doorstep" to be something less than a completely satisfying stage production. The plot gets in the way of the proceedings as often as it expedites them. The dialogue is frequently dull and characters disappear before you even become acquainted with them. It might have been a good idea if they had worked backward on their comedy. In any case, it builds steadily to an amusing climax.

* * *

They are examining a run-down family on the Mississippi delta which is faintly akin to the Lester tribe of "Tobacco Road." To their great credit they do not resort to innuendo to make their little play stand up. You will like the Crochets if you are amused by their antics. You are almost certain to laugh with them rather than at them. In their rather frenzied efforts to buy a piece of land of their own, they emerge as human and recognizable characters, even though their misadventures are highly contrived.

Whatever credit the authors may claim for this fact, the performances have much to do with the play's gentle hilarity. Louis Calhern, who has increased his acting stature no end since appearing in "Life With Father," contributes a robust and boisterous portrayal of a lazy ditch-digger, who puts the arm on strangers and intimates to slight avail and wonders why he is a failure. Dorothy Gish plays Mrs. Crochet a bit unevenly, particularly when she is asked to mix French patois and English, but she succeeds in bringing sympathy and dramatic power to the final scenes.

* * *

Meanwhile Joy Geffen is excellent as the young daughter of the Cajun clan; Clay Clement has a braggadocio bit as the patriarch's brother who gives him a bum check, and Dickie Monahan and Gerald Matthews are fine as a couple of tykes who are bewildered by adult problems. "The Great Big Doorstep" has sustained comedy and characterization. It has been splendidly staged by Shumlin. All it needed to be a genuinely fine folk drama was more rigorous dramatic invention.

"The Great Big Doorstep"

NEW YORK SUN
November 27, 1942

"The Great Big Doorstep"

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"THE GREAT BIG DOORSTEP," which opened at the Morosco last evening, is to be counted as folk comedy, being devoted to the engaging idiosyncrasies of odd poeple living in the backwoods of Louisiana. Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett have fashioned it from a novel by E. P. O'Donnell and have, I suspect, done a good job of it. They come up with a small, pleasant play which is often comic but never very enterprising.

The authors consider a family of "Cajuns"—people of Acadian French descent—which is headed by an optimistic ditch-digger, and lives in a tumble-down shanty which might have stood on Tobacco Road. But the Crochets are not Tobacco Roaders, being clean and hopeful and in the end lucky. Before luck comes there are vicissitudes, concerned chiefly with their efforts to get the big house next door by paying the back taxes. (The big house will just fit the fine big doorstep they already have, a gift from the river at flood-tide.) One prospective benefactor gets knifed off stage, a second gives them a rubber check, and when good fortune comes it comes to them—if possibly not to the audience—like a bolt from the blue.

The plot, as you may guess from this, is not important. The play lives, if it does, on its funny characters—on funny Mr. Crochet, on plucky, amusing Mrs. Crochet, on the girl who decides not to be a nun, on the drunken brother who visits them, on the tow-headed twins. Mr. Crochet is by far the funniest of them all and he is as quaint as anything you would care to meet. Realizing this, the authors see that you meet him constantly. They also give him some very funny things to say.

To last evening's audience this was evidently enough and I should not care to quarrel violently with the audience's verdict. It did seem, as time crept on, that we met the quaint Mr. Crochet rather often and that the play tended to resemble a series of entertaining, but very still, photographs, taken of the same subjects from a variety of angles. And certainly "The Great Big Doorstep" has one of the tamest plots ever led through three acts.

Louis Calhern is broadly amusing as Mr. Crochet, a role he acts with sweeping generosity. Dorothy Gish gives a sharp, comprehensive picture of Mrs. Crochet, who is by turns delighted and very cross with her mercurial husband. Joy Geffen and Jeanne Perkins Smith are amusing as the daughters and Clay Clement is lavishly entertaining as the intoxicated brother. The rest, under the attentive direction of Herman Shumlin, do nicely by the cheerfully monotonous play.

"The Great Big Doorstep" and "The Pirate"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 27, 1942

Two New Plays For the Holidays

By BURTON RASCOE

THE Great Dark Way was considerably brightened, at least within the Martin Beck and Morosco theaters by the opening, on Thanksgiving Eve, of The Pirate at the former and of The Great Big Doorstep, last night at the latter. The Lunt-Fontanne vehicle, which S. N. Behrman (with the aid of Herbert Kingsley, who wrote the music; Lemuel Ayres, who did the sumptuous settings, and Miles White, who went on a spree with the costuming) cooked up from an idea by Ludwig Fulda, is an opera bouffe faithfully adhering to the Spanish style of comic opera, even to the Spanish type of humor, which is that of sententious exaggeration. The Great Big Doorstep is a regional play about the Cajuns of the Louisiana Delta, beautifully dramatized by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett from a beautiful novel by E. P. O'Donnell.

As for me, my heart is with The Great Big Doorstep on this occasion and you will pardon me if I seem to give the Behrman opus a quick dustoff. The Lunt-Fontanne devotees (of whom I am one) will not care, anyway, how thin or hollow any entertainment is, so long as the Lunts are in it; and even if I whisper that The Pirate (in spite of its enormous ballyhoo) may disappoint them, they won't take my word for it that S. N. Behrman seems inexplicably to have decided this was no time for comedy and Herbert Kingsley also seems to have decided that, even in an opera bouffe, this is no time for music; they will flock to the Martin Beck to see for themselves; and they will go away with their eyes still gorged by the color lavished upon the scenes by Lemuel Ayres, still gasping over the costumes by Miles White, in which Miss Fontanne never looked lovelier, and perhaps quoting some of the new epigrams from the Behrman epigram-machine, on which he has a patent.

But, take my word for it, you'll have a much better time at The Great Big Doorstep, Lunt fan or not, and all the more so because, somehow, you probably cannot imagine how a play about shanty folk of the Mississippi Delta could be any fun. My tip is, just go see it and get the surprise of your life. Even Louis Calhern is good in it (excellent, in fact) and that's something I don't ask you to believe until you see for yourself. And, as for Dorothy Gish, she proves herself to be, in this play, one of the finest character actresses we have—she is a Cajun woman to the life, even to the Delta accent and way of talking (I know, because I've been there) and she is appealing and naturalistic in every shade of feeling, from anger to solicitude, from inebriated joy to tragic disappointment.

* * *

Staging a Triumph of Detail

Herman Shumlin has staged The Great Big Doorstep with great care. The setting by Howard Bay is not in the modern manner of "suggestion" (a la the Chinese theater, or the Globe of Shakespeare's day) but in the more satisfactory (to me) tradition of Belasco you are not called upon to imagine a scene you may know nothing about: the Delta shanty and the Delta yard of swampgrass and orange trees are there before your eyes. . . . Of course, they had to be, for the drama is largely woven about the great doorstep from a mansion that was washed up on the Crochets' rented land by the flood and is attached to the Cajun family's rickety house, at once reminding them of the splendor and luxury they have missed and inspiring their hopes that they may some day have a house to go with the porch.

"Commodore" Crochet (Louis Calhern) is a shiftless glutton who lost his riverboat pilot's license by going to sleep at the wheel and losing a boatload of mules; he was also a "failure on WPA"; but he has imagination and a certain pathetic dignity that is sufficiently appealing to Mrs. Crochet (Dorothy Gish) to make her more or less content with her hard-bitten existence, even when she sees the two daughters and a son of her six children aching to escape from her to the city.

An opportunity presents itself for the Crochets to have a house to go with the doorstep and it seems actually within their grasp in a hilarious second act when Mr. Calhern's brother, an employed pilot, arrives very drunk and in a generous mood. The climax of this scene brought down the house, for it was a see-saw of pride between Mr. Calhern and Clay Clement (as the semi-benevolent brother) and played with great gusto.

The brother is a phony, unhappily, and in the next act it turns out that the hundred-dollar check he has given the Crochets is of the bouncing kind which (distances being such as they are in the Delta) doesn't cease bouncing until the Crochets have stripped the shanty of their belonging and have moved nearly everything but the big doorstep to the new house.

* * *

Land of the Delta Lilies

If the happy ending of The Great Big Doorstep taxes your credulity, that's where you are wrong. For it is an exact paradigm of what has happened to hundreds of Crochets in the Delta. The most beautiful lilies in the world have long been grown there, but because the Delta is so far away from the fresh flower market the Cajuns, except for the very poorest class, declined to grow them, utilizing their land to grow citrus fruits instead; and those who did grow the lilies kept the fact pretty much a shameful secret because they could sell the bulbs for only a few pennies the basketful. They pinched the flowers off to make the bulbs fatter and thus quite unknowingly improved the species. And then the closing of the Bermuda market drew attention to the Delta lilies; they are now brought to New York from the New Orleans market and lavishly used at weddings and funerals—giving the Cajuns their best-paying crop.

Aside from the superb performances given by Miss Gish, Mr. Calhern and Mr. Clement, for which I give Delta lilies of the prettiest growth, I wish to bestow them also upon Joy Geffen as the buxom lass destined for the nunnery because of her romantic feeling about Evangeline (Cajun is a corruption of "Acadian"; the Acadians are the descendants of the French settlers of Nova Scotia, whose exile is celebrated by Longfellow); to Morton L. Stevens, to Jeanne Perkins Smith and to the kids, Dickie Monahan and Gerald Matthews.

* * *

Mr. Lunt Wins the Pirate's Wife

You probably already have heard that, in The Pirate, Mr. Lunt is a mountebank at the head of a troupe of strolling players and forbidden to play in the West Indian village ruled over by a pirate who has married the beautiful Miss Fontanne, has settled down as a man of business and is keeping his past a secret. Miss Fontanne, a reader of forbidden literature, is entranced by a biography of the notorious Estramudo (who happens to be her husband) and finds in him her dream hero because of his dashing exploits in carnality and carnage—so unlike her gross husband who sleeps in a hammock when he is not casting up accounts. Recognizing the Pirate, Mr. Lunt makes the most of the fake Pedro's guilty secret (there's a price on his head) by claiming himself to be the hero of Miss Fontanne's favorite book and making the real pirate co-operate in the duplicity.

He walks a tight rope to Miss Fontanne's boudoir and there makes extravagant love to Miss Fontanne even in the presence of her husband. In a demonstration of mesmerism, Miss Fontanne not only betrays her love for the mountebank, but also reveals that she has learned the true character of her husband, delivering him over to the viceroy to be put to death.

The first act of The Pirate drags tediously and the whole performance would be immeasurably helped by more music, incidental or otherwise and—by some other composer; for the scanty music supplied may be very West Indian; but, if so, maybe that's what's wrong with it. Miss Fontanne is so lovely she ought to be framed and sold among the Gould and Hearst treasures at Gimbels in many duplicates; and Mr. Lunt is insouciant and amusing in the way you expected him to be, but perhaps owes too much to the influence of Noel Coward.

"The Pirate"

NEW YORK SUN
November 27, 1942

'The Pirate' Opens at the Martin Beck

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Lunts are in high spirits in S. N. Behrman's "The Pirate," which opened Wednesday evening at the Martin Beck. Alfred walks a tight rope to achieve the bedroom of his lady; he also pulls a rabbit out of a baking dish, turns a pair of gloves into a bouquet and hypnotizes Lynn. She, looking very lovely, goes into a trance and is recalled from it only by love, hoodwinks a stodgy husband and saves her lover from the scaffold.

It is a frolic, full of extravagant scenery and amusing costumes and the lively music of a motley band. It is a show, bright and colorful, and the Lunts give evidence of reveling in it. They hardly seem to notice that Mr. Behrman has neglected to write them a play; that "The Pirate" is more an excuse for a party than the romantic comedy, with casually satirical undertones, which it may have looked like when Mr. Behrman was writing it. You would never think to watch the Lunts that their author has, for all practical purposes, left them high and dry.

The play's story, in outline, is engaging enough. In the West Indies a hundred years or so ago there was a lovely lady married, unknowingly, to a retired pirate, who had the humdrum guise of a pudgy merchant. Bored, the lady turned to fiction, reading the romanticized story of the life of the very pirate her husband was. She was ripe for the debonair charm of a strolling player and ready enough to believe him when he, knowing the full flavor of the jest, pretended to be the famous pirate of her dreams. He captivated her with stories of outlawry as well as by the arts of the mountebank, and it was no real trick to dispose of the husband in the end.

This story, which Mr. Behrman seems to have adopted from a play by Ludwig Fulda, ought to have become in the Berhman hands a gay, romantic joke. But somehow it has been submerged, perhaps partly by the production. The wit which is naturally to be expected rarely appears; there are efforts at broad comedy which are merely effortful. At its best "The Pirate" is only a vehicle for its stars; at its worst it is a vehicle with flat tires.

But it does bring the Lunts. Mr. Lunt gives a fine, swaggering performance, sly and full of zest. Miss Fontanne is captivating and assured, brightening everything she touches. They are helped by the rest—by Alan Reed as the heavy husband, Estelle Winwood as Miss Fontanne's flighty mother, by the exuberance of all in the large cast and by the inventiveness of the staging. Lemuel Ayers has helped, too, with colorfully extravagant settings, and Miles White's costumes reflect the carefree spirit.

But it is the Lunts who are giving the party at the Martin Beck. It's sort of a pity that Mr. Behrman couldn't come.

'THE PIRATE'

A comedy in three acts by S. N. Behrman; staged by Alfred Lunt and John C. Wilson; settings by Lemuel Ayers; costumes by Miles White; presented at the Martin Beck Theater on November 25, 1942, by the Playwrights Company and the Theater Guild. The cast:

Manuela	Lynn Fontanne
Pedro Vargas	Alan Reed
Isabella	Lea Penman
Mango Seller	Juanita Hall
Fisherboy	Albert Popwell
Ines	Estelle Winwood
Capucho	James O'Neill
Lizarda	Muriel Rahn
Estaban	Robert Emhardt
Don Bolo	Walter Mosby
Trillo	Maurice Ellis
Serafin	Alfred Lunt
Viceroy	Clarence Derwent
Maids to Manuela	Ruby Greene, Anna Jackson, Lavinia White
Maid to Isabella	Inez Matthews
Viceroy's Guards	Guy Monypenny, Peter Garey

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 26, 1942

'The Pirate' a Comedy Circus With Hoopla and Both Lunts

"The Pirate," comedy by S. N. Behrman, suggested by Ludwig Fulda. Produced by the Playwrights' Company and the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, Nov. 25, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU will remember the fun Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne had playing "The Taming of the Shrew." How they practically remade that fine old Shakespearean romp by setting it up with a lot of bizarre scenery, dressing it in extravagant costumes and playing it in a spirit of hoop-la that was fun for everybody, especially Alfred?

They have worked the same trick with an old Ludwig Fulda comedy. This is "The Pirate," which the favored couple brought to the Martin Beck last night. S. N. Behrman has written the dialogue for them, and Mr. Lunt, working with John C. Wilson, has staged the play with the flourish of an actor who loves the theatre most when it is most colorful.

Of course, a Fulda is not a Shakespeare, even in farce. What Behrman had to work with is pretty thin stuff, even as an idea, and I seriously doubt that his heart was deeply concerned with the job.

But, thanks to the Lunt enthusiasm, and a stage filled with striking costumes and flashing scenery, "The Pirate" furnishes an evening's entertainment that will pass for the present.

Down Santo Domingo Way

The locale chosen for the play is that of the West Indies. A small village in San Domingo will do as well as any other location, if you would be specific. It is early in the 19th century, and the mayor of the village is fat and dull and autocratic.

Along comes a troupe of ragtags headed by Mr. Lunt, craving the privilege of giving a show. No, says the Mayor. He doesn't care for art, and he doesn't care to be disturbed.

But Alfred, being keen, recognizes the fat one as none other than the almost legendary Estramudo, a piratical fellow who some years back did several fine jobs of murder and pillage in the Carribean.

Now it also happens, which should not surprise you in the least, that the fat and unromantic mayor is married to the most beautiful of the village belles, an alert, imaginative and ever so romantic young woman.

It follows reasonably that she should, after a bit of fencing, become a little enamored of the importunate trouper and that he should be fascinated by her beauty and charm.

Love's Victim

He invades her boudoir, but falls victim to his own trickery when he tells her that she is married to a pirate, thereby transferring her interest back to the dullard when she thinks of his romantic past.

Then the lover recovers ground by mesmermizing the lady and having her, in the comedy's best scene, reveal her husband's crimes to the viceroy, who has come to see the actor's show.

Simple stuff, spattered with several bright Behrman lines, acted with persuasive spirit by Mr. Lunt and effective romantic languor by Miss Fontanne.

The lady, too, is looking especially beautiful in blue this season, with more color in her cheeks than she sometimes permits.

The support has little chance. Alan Reed makes the mayor plausible. Lea Penman and Estelle Winwood flit through short parts pleasantly. Clarence Derwent has one well played scene as the viceroy. And there is a troupe of interesting colored players headed by Walter Mosby.

The costumes are by Miles White, the settings by Lemuel Ayers, West Indian dances, all nicely timed, by Felicia Sorel. Herbert Kingsley has written atmospheric music.

NEW YORK POST
November 27, 1942

"The Pirate" Brings the Lunts Back in Frolicsome Mood

By WILELLA WALDORF

LYNN FONTANNE and Alfred Lunt have seldom appeared as captivatingly romantic as they do in the luscious costumes designed for them by Miles White in "The Pirate," which opened at the Martin Beck Theatre on Wednesday evening. Their posturing before Lemuel Ayers' colorful scenery depicting a small West Indian village early in the 19th century is pictorially enchanting.

"The Pirate," in fact, is so joyously bedecked in the giddy trappings of picaresque comedy that it is doubly depressing to realize as it goes on that as a play it is aggressively and persistently dull.

To apply the word soporific to anything, no matter what, in which the ineffable Lunts appear would have seemed, only a short time ago, an impossibility. But "The Pirate," we are horrified to report, demands that adjective.

A Disappointingly Dull Play

Miss Fontanne has never looked younger or more fetching than she does in those billowy Spanish gowns in which she sweeps across the stage as the dutiful wife of a bloated West Indian merchant. Mr. Lunt, the strolling actor and mountebank who arrives with his tatterdemalion troupe to perform in the public square, is a fascinating fellow full of braggadocio, audacity and charm.

To provide two such delectable personalities with a play in which to exert their well-known allure would seem to be a reasonably simple task. Except for a few merry passages here and there, however, S. N. Behrman's comedy, based on an idea from an early Spanish work by one Ludwig Fulda, is lacking in wit, sparkle and dexterity. The actors, working themselves into a perspiration trying to make it sound devastatingly clever and original, are in the end forced to fall back on the show which Mr. Lunt and his fellow thespians eventually put on in the public square.

Mr. Lunt, it will be recalled, has fancied himself as a clown before, and he can be, as a matter of fact, a pretty good vaudevillian when occasion arises. In "Idiot's Delight," remember, he did a hoofing number with a line of chorus girls behind him, while his caperings in that delirious production of "The Taming of the Shrew" are still fresh in many a theatregoer's memory.

Alfred Lunt, Magician

In "The Pirate" he indulges in a dash of hypnotism and magic, dealing expertly with disappearing rabbits and casting a spell over Miss Fontanne, who thus handily reveals the fact that her obese husband, and not the fascinating mountebank, is really the notorious pirate, with a price on his head, whom the Viceroy is on the verge of arresting.

Mr. Lunt's little show, in which he is assisted in song and dance by a genial company of Negro performers and musicians, provides a welcome oasis in the barren desert of talk that has gone before, but only for a brief period.

Beautifully caparisoned as it is, and hard as its actors work to persuade us that here is something dazzlingly witty and full of spice, "The Pirate" is an audacious theatrical gesture that does not come off. The Lunts, delightful artists both, may be able to get away with it for a while, but it is the nearest approach to nothing they have ever tried to employ as a vehicle.

"The Pirate"

NEW YORK TIMES
November 26, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"The Pirate"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE theatre celebrated Thanksgiving a little early this year, quietly advancing the clock a few hours in order to bring the Lunts back to town. Anything that serves to return the Lunts to Broadway is an occasion for rejoicing, for they are the theatre's greatest pair of actors, and they have been magnificent in plays from Shakespeare to Sherwood, with snatches of vaudeville thrown in to relieve the danger of too much intensity. This time they are in their vaudeville mood, for "The Pirate," which S. N. Behrman picked up from an idea in a play by Ludwig Fulda, is flamboyant and bizarre, and it gives the Lunts an opportunity for burlesque thus far unparalleled in their combined career.

Mr. Lunt obviously is a vaudeville artist and a hoofer at heart. Quite clearly, when he should have been milking the cows on his renowned Genesee Depot farm, he has been practicing legerdemain, pulling rabbits out of chance visitors' hats and experimenting with the strut that is the hallmark of the more distinguished sleight-of-hand geniuses. In "The Pirate" he has the opportunity to wallow in these new-found joys, and Mr. Lunt is not a vaudeville artist to let his public down. Give him the end of the run and he will move over to Loew's State, there to go on and on as mesmerist and dancer; he has arrived.

* * *

That "The Pirate" was written for its distinguished players cannot be doubted, for it is not out of Mr. Behrman's usual drawer—in fact, some traces of that drawer linger around long enough to throw the play out of joint sometimes, and to slow down the action into good drawing room conversation. At that graceful art Mr. Behrman has no peer, but here he is writing a gaudy tale that should be filled only with high-flown phrases, and the occasional peering forth of the terse epigrammatist serves to distract by changing humor into wit—or just leaving it as conversation.

It is the story of Manuela and Pedro Vargas and Serafin, and, of course, Estramudo, the pirate. Pedro is the stuffy man of business, Manuela the wife who reads the romantic tales of piracy, and Serafin the strolling player who brings his troupe to town to give a performance or so before starving elsewhere. In order to woo Manuela away from her husband, the player boasts that he really is the pirate, a safe gesture on his part, because already he has recognized Estramudo in the person of the man of affairs. It all ends with Serafin carrying his Miss Fontanne off after her quite unwanted husband had been exposed and ordered to jail.

* * *

And it is a sufficient plot to set forth before the Lunts, for they can do anything. Miss Fontanne is roguish, coquettish, practical, by turns; she will speak gaily to charming strangers who very likely may be pirates, and she can order them out of her house with a firmness marred only by the slightest of winks. Mr. Lunt can be bumptious or pleading, and, in addition to all that, he can break an egg to make an omelet and then find it turn into a rabbit. The man obviously has studied.

There are many moments of great charm in "The Pirate." The entrance of Mr. Lunt is one. Preceded by a tatterdemalion Negro band, and drawn in a carriage by his fellow-players, he comes across the stage, steps out, does a little dance and then is ready for the business at hand. Another moment is when he walks a tight-rope from one balcony to that of his lady, his expression on the journey being a magnificent one of casual concentration. The whole scene of the troupe's performance at the end of the play is the Lunts' type of theatre at its best.

The Playwrights' Company and Theatre Guild, which jointly offered the play, have done a beautiful job of costuming and staging. For direction, there again it is Mr. Lunt and John C. Wilson. The costumes, which are the most gorgeous seen along Broadway in years, are by Miles White, and the settings, in perfect keeping with the play, are Lemuel Ayers's. When the Lunts set out to do a burlesque-vaudeville, they dress it well.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 26, 1942

Pirate's Delight

By HOWARD BARNES

AN ELOQUENT and witty farce has been well served at the Martin Beck. S. N. Behrman's "The Pirate," which opened there last night, has bravura acting, crafty staging and a glittering production. With Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne romping through the comical fantasy as only they can romp, it is a sustained delight. Author and players can be mutually grateful to each other in this Playwrights' Company-Theater Guild production. It adds immeasurably to the gaiety of the season.

Mr. Behrman is concerned with no more weighty problem in his latest play than in generating amusement. The point is that he succeeds triumphantly in this somewhat hazardous project. Employing his great gift for literate dialogue and his sure instinct for human foibles, he has woven a gossamer but gorgeous lark about a pirate, a mountebank and a lady. The scene and time of the play are remote. It is laid in a West Indies town in the early part of the nineteenth century. The humor is enduring and irresistible.

* * *

It has been the author's notion to have a wandering minstrel recognize a reformed buccaneer whose lovely wife does not relish his stodgy respectability. The actor fellow passes himself off as the swashbuckler and plays the deception so persuasively that he almost goes to the gallows. You doubtless will not be surprised to learn that the farcical doings end on a felicitous note, as the real pirate gets his comeuppance and the mountebank and his adored one are free to troupe across the seven seas.

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Now, this is rather slim stuff for straight theater. Without consummate writing and playing it might have looked suspiciously like a period movie musical shorn of its music and dancing girls. As it is, "The Pirate" is infinitely varied and enchanting. The scenes between the principals are filled with wit and even touches of wisdom. They are interspersed with gala bits of spectacle, as a show is put on in the village square. This, I think, is a farcical fantasy which is sheer theater, and very good theater, too.

* * *

The Lunts contribute no end to the fun, of course. Mr. Behrman has written brilliantly for their particular talents of superior clowning and they use their talents to great effect. It is emphatic acting, but that is what "The Pirate" wanted. Lunt is superb as he pretends to walk a tight rope, breaks up a deadly marriage, or contemplates hanging. Miss Fontanne is not only assured but lovely in the role of the pirate's wife. Meanwhile Alan Reed, as the pirate, Estelle Winwood, as a calculating mother, Clarence Derwent as the viceroy and the other players are exactly what they should be in this comedy. Incidentally, the settings by Lemuel Ayers and the costumes of Miles White, are imaginative and resplendent, while John C. Wilson and Lunt have seen to it that the staging is always ingenious.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
November 27, 1942

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne Star in S. N. Behrman's New Comedy

By JOHN ANDERSON

NOW come the Lunts, Mr. and Mrs. in the skylarking mood of their shiniest monkeyshines, in a show called "The Pirate," by S. N. Behrman, to add some fun and much furore to the season, to lend some high color and bright nonsense to our somber times. Their pretty errand is done under the joint auspices of the Playwrights' Company and the Theatre Guild at Martin Beck's Theatre, and it provides a splurging romp for our theatre's foremost acting couple. If it provides something less than that for its audience it is not the players' fault. It may even last them for a conservative duration.

Not since they horsed Sweet William's "Taming of the Shrew" have Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne done such a three-ring circus. Not since they went boop-a-doop with the Bard have they turned on all the gaudy lights of showmanship and let themselves go. Since they have a deep relish for sinewy theatricals and since, at their best, they are a show in themselves, their bustling arrival gives the season a lift—even if there is also the suspicion that the lift is by their own bootstraps.

Based on Old Play

For the truth is that they carry the play, and it is plainly something of a load. Unlike their smarter frolics, it lacks the buoyant strength to let them sail dazzingly on the crest. The effort is the other way around. They get away with it, but too often it is with the suggestion that they do so by sheer force of their own propulsive energies. The play does not nourish their spontaneity. It merely relies on it.

The play bill says that Mr. Behrman's comedy was "suggested by an idea in a play by Ludwig Fulda." Herr Fulda was a nineteenth century romantic dramatist until he took to translating Ibsen into German, and his original "Der Seerauber" held some sentimental attachment for Mr. Lunt, since he played in it long ago before he met fame, fortune, or Fontanne.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Behrman has used more than a suggestion, since the central plot, most of the characters and some of the motivation are still intact. It concerns Manuela, a dreamy, convent-bred young woman of the early 1800's, living in a small village in the West Indies with a stodgy, rich, sleepily fat husband, who objects even to her reading about the doings of a notorious pirate, one Estramudo, celebrated as much for his amours as for his piracy.

Into the little village comes Serafin, a traveling mountebank, and his troupe of starving players. To capture Manuela's already aroused interest he tells her that he is Estramudo, and while he is under arrest he gives a performance before the Governor and the townspeople, mesmerizes Manuela, and lets her publicly declare her love for him. It turns

(Continued on Page 170)

"The Pirate"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 26, 1942

The Lunts Get By Without Any Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF YOU don't regard a dull play as too much of a hindrance, you may have a rather pleasant time at *The Pirate*. The Lunts are in it up to their necks, for one thing; and it would take more than just a dull play to dampen the spirits, or wreck the success, of the Lunts. What with its gorgeous trimmings, its glints of wit, and its bouts of vaudeville, *The Pirate* should do nicely for them.

It's possibly inaccurate to call *The Pirate* a play in the first place. Call it an extravaganza, an opera bouffe, a vehicle, a period piece, a costume job, a high-styled bore, a polished impromptu—anything, indeed, except a play. It enables Mr. Lunt to act a strolling player and impersonate a pirate, to walk (or almost walk) a tightrope, perform magician's tricks, make fantastic love in high bravura fashion and mesmerize his loved one. All this he does in the style to which we are accustomed—with plenty of prancing verve and swashbuckling dash and comic extravagance. *The Pirate* also enables Miss Fantanne, with her trailing, mocking voice and her deftly stylized manner, to react mischievously to Mr. Lunt's boisterous advances, and to look incredibly young.

There are, to continue, Lemuel Ayers' gay and charming and witty sets, and Miles White's glowing and brilliant costumes. The eye has looked on nothing so fine this season. There are Herbert Kingsley's happy bursts of music—half evocative, half derisory. There are also Mr. Behrman's own flashes of wit, admirable but far from abundant, and his success at times with extravagantly elegant, deliberately artificial dialogue. But to sustain that kind of thing is the hardest thing in the world, and Mr. Behrman can't begin to do it. He gets his best effects when he suddenly swoops down from high-sounding utterance to present-day slang; but that, too, is a trick that's soon played out. On the whole, Mr. Behrman does not quicken his play with words; he merely smothers it.

* * *

The play itself is the least—and the worst—of the matter, but you might want to know that it tells of an early 19th-century West Indian lady who enlivens her marriage to a fat, middle-aged dullard by reading tales of romance, particularly one about a pirate called Estramudo. Comes a strolling player who falls in love with the lady and, to win her favor, boasts of being Estramudo himself. As a result of his boast, he is in a fair way to hang; and as though that didn't complicate matters enough, it turns out that the actual Estramudo is the lady's fat husband—he having reformed some years back. To get by with such foiderol, you must obviously have one of two things: a first-rate musical-comedy score, or a lady and gentleman from Genesee Depot, Wis.

"Counsellor-at-Law"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 25, 1942

Mr. Muni Resumes His Law Practice

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ELEVEN years may have rubbed some of the edge of *Counsellor-at-Law*, but they have done it no serious harm. It's still a lively and entertaining piece of theater, and in the title role Paul Muni once more offers an admirably varied and vigorous performance. If it isn't a particularly brilliant choice for a revival, it is certainly not a foolish one.

The play is theater, every inch of it, and that is what is good about it. Mr. Rice wrote it when he still had a fine knack for getting life into a scene, color into a character, atmosphere into a law office and energy into an incident. The scenes, on closer inspection, may be trite or even twaddly, the characters mere stencils, the office mere photography, the incident mere padding. But the whole thing chooses its level and sticks to it. It picks its pace and maintains it. The dialogue is brisk, the stagecraft knowing, and best of all there is the full-sized, momentarily fascinating, temporarily convincing character of George Simon himself—the brilliantly successful, generous, spectacular, hard-working, quick-witted lawyer who gets into a jam and eventually gets out of it.

If, in the end, the play isn't worth a second thought, that's all in its favor. You know where you stand with it. There's nothing pretentious, and hence deceptive about it. It's not one of those infuriating mixtures of the genuine and the phony that send you away dissatisfied and even disgusted. As sheer theater, it has its own kind of exhilaration. If its characters are broad as a barn door, they're so much the better as targets.

Mr. Rice has staged the play well. Mr. Muni remains extraordinarily good in the part that carried him to fame. It's a showy part that fits his talents, and he keeps it animated and lifelike with all kinds of turns and shadings. Joan Wetmore plays the all-too-cold and haughty wife with a certain evenness and style, and Olive Deering is warm and likable as the secretary. Ann Thomas, Kurt Richards, Jennie Moscowitz and Barrie Wanless are effective in bit parts, while Clara Langsner and Jack Sheehan are decidedly something more.

'COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW'

A comedy in three acts by Elmer Rice; staged by Mr. Rice; designed by Raymond Sovey; revived at the Royale Theater on November 24, 1942, by John Golden. The cast:

Bessie Green	Ann Thomas
Henry Susskind	Leslie Barrett
Sarah Becker	Clara Langsner
A Little Man	Edwin Hugh
A Large Man	Jay Velle
Zedorah Chapman	Betty Kelley
Goldie Rindskoff	Frieda Altman
Charles McFadden	Jack Sheehan
John P. Tedesco	Sam Bonnell
A Bootblack	William Vaughan
Regina Gordon	Olive Deering
Herbert Howard Weinberg	Kurt Richards
Arthur Sandler	John McQuade
Lillian Larue	Frances Tannehill
A Boy	Caleb Gray
Roy Darwin	Alexander Clark
George Simon	Paul Muni
Cora Simon	Joan Wetmore
A Woman	Jane Hamilton
Lena Simon	Jennie Moscowitz
Peter J. Malone	John L. Kearney
Johann Breitstein	Barrie Wanless
David Simon	Philip Gordon
Harry Becker	Joseph Pevney
Richard Dwight Jr.	Buddy Buehler
Dorothy Dwight	Norma Clerc
Francis Clark Baird	Elmer Brown

NEW YORK TIMES
November 25, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Counsellor-at-Law"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE playwrights not having been busy this season in turning out new plays for Paul Muni, Mr. Muni did the next best thing last evening by coming back to town in one of his old ones. Elmer Rice's "Counsellor-at-Law." No doubt next best understates the case, for Mr. Muni would have to search far and long before finding something that could equal it for his purposes, and the play in turn would have to search considerably through the court records finding a better player for its leading role. Once again the same play and the actor have combined to make a good evening in the theatre.

It is just eleven years since Mr. Rice wrote his story of the lawyer risen from the East Side and the dark corridors of the police courts, and since Mr. Muni first played George Simon. A new generation of theatregoers has come up since then, many members of which have seen either the play without the actor or the actor without the play, and who now can find them together, where quite properly they belong. With Mr. Rice to supervise the production, there have been a few minor changes for the revival at the Royale, but the fact that only few were required is proof that Mr. Rice, when first he was setting it all down, was delivering a taut, tidy play that could stand on its own for a long time.

This time the play is under John Golden's management, and they are billing it as a comedy. But it is not that entirely, for through the law offices of Simon & Tedesco wander all the types that populated Mr. Rice's "Street Scene"—and the types that wander in and out of the magistrates' courts and even up to the Appellate Division. As a supervisor of his own play, Mr. Rice is not the one to nudge humor from the mother who is worried about the fate of her son who has been beaten by the police, or to change in any way the gentle relationship existing between the counsellor-at-law and his mother. Let frightened devotees of the play be not worried by its new category of comedy; it has just what it had before.

The evening, of course, is Mr. Muni's. With a soft voice and a loud roar, with quietness, gentleness and fierceness in turn, he dominates the role as though he had started with it years before, as a child selling papers on the East Side, and had risen with it to the Fifth Avenue office of Simon and Tedesco. In the one role he is seven or eight Paul Muni's, smooth and accurately setting forth as many phases as there are types crossing the threshold of the office. He is the "Counsellor-at-Law," no exception being granted.

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Also from the original company, which played month after month along Broadway, comes Jennie Moscowitz as the counsellor's aged mother, who has moved uptown to live with pride in her son and a sense that tells her of any difficulties he may be facing. Olive Deering is the secretary and Joan Wetmore the wife the counsellor married from society and who didn't think much of him. Miss Wetmore makes Cora Simon somewhat more disagreeable than even Mr. Rice, writing in 1933, must have thought her. And to Ann Thomas has gone the role of Goldie, the office switchboard girl, who makes it all sound quite perfectly like any office along old Center Street and some on old Broadway as well.

"Counsellor-at-Law"

NEW YORK POST
November 25, 1942

Paul Muni Reappears in Elmer Rice's "Counsellor-at-Law"

By WILELLA WALDORF

ELEVEN years have passed since Paul Muni first acted "Counselor-at-Law" on Broadway and it is still a far better vehicle than anything he has done since. Occupied for many years with film work, he has several times indicated a desire to return to the stage, but a new play worthy of his talents has never seemed to be available. Neither Maxwell Anderson's "Key Largo" nor, more recently, Emlyn Williams' "Yesterday's Magic" measured up to his standard.

Fortunately Mr. Muni still wanted to come back to the stage, and, undiscouraged by the lack of suitable new scripts, he has simply turned back to an old one. Under John Golden's management he reappeared last night, at the Royale Theatre, in Elmer Rice's leisurely but steadily engrossing play, "Counsellor-at-Law," as the fabulously successful criminal lawyer, George Simon, who came over in the steerage, grew up on Second Avenue and worked himself to prominence the hard way.

The Legal Profession

It is unnecessary to go into the meagre little plot that keeps the play meandering along for three acts. It is, as a matter of fact, the sort of simple frame that detective novels often employ in one form or another. What interests Mr. Rice is developing a portrait of this legal genius as he operates during office hours. The setting is shunted back and forth to indicate George Simon's private sanctum and the outer office of the law firm of Simon and Tedesco, Counsellors-at-Law.

Gradually the outlines begin to develop of the East Side Jewish boy who made good in his chosen profession and rose to affluence with a country home in Westchester and a lofty wife in the Social Register, but never forgot the humble neighbors he used to know on Second Avenue.

All this Mr. Rice sketches in through a series of business calls on the great man, plus sundry glimpses of what goes on in the outer office. There is nothing particularly startling or unusual about it, but the author, who once was a lawyer himself, knows his background and his people, and he has blended them together with a sure hand to provide a human, moving and often very diverting play.

A Well-Balanced Company

It is a constant pleasure to watch Mr. Muni perform in a part which he has long since made his own. No violent dramatic transports are required of him in the role of George Simon. He goes about the business of acting him quietly but with perfect understanding of the frame Mr. Rice has drawn for him to inhabit. It is a beautiful job of collaboration.

Mr. Golden has extended himself in providing a supporting cast. This may be a revival, but it is played as sharply and as brilliantly in every detail as if it were a brand new venture. The company is large and there's not a weak spot in it.

Jennie Moscowitz, who was with Mr. Muni eleven years ago, is back to give her touching portrayal of the lawyer's mother. Ann Thomas is the perfect switchboard operator with the chattering tongue. Olive Deering is good as the secretary who is—of course—in love with her employer, while Joan Wetmore as the upper-class wife succeeds in making everybody in the audience want to kick her, which is precisely what she is expected to do.

Joseph Pevney has a vivid scene as the young Communist who doesn't mind being beaten up for the Cause, and Clara Langsner is affecting as his old mother. Jack Sheehan is amusing as the process server who plays detective on occasion with telling results.

There were a few mumbled complaints last night that George Simon's office was not, perhaps, as impressively opulent as one might imagine for a lawyer of his eminence, bank account and social connections. Not having had occasion to consult a famous criminal lawyer lately, we wouldn't know about that offhand.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 25, 1942

An Old Favorite Returns

By JOSEPH PIHODNA

ELMER RICE'S drama, which is billed as a comedy now, about the East Side boy who achieves fame as a criminal lawyer bears up pretty well under revival at the Royale Theater. The play was presented at the Plymouth Theater eleven years ago almost to the day. John Golden, who felt that Paul Muni's excellent acting in the original version should not be missed by the generation which sprang up since 1931, convinced the famous player to appear in a revival of "Counsellor-at-Law" under his banner.

* * *

Possibly the tale of the Jewish boy who clawed his way to eminence as a lawyer has more significance today than it did in the not so distant past, which had its own peculiar problems. There will be those who will perhaps find fault with the drama, which deals with a Yankee lawyer out to disbar a Jewish lawyer who is clever enough to beat him at his own game. However, whatever the personal feelings may be, one can't help feeling that Muni is portraying a role particularly suited to his talents as a character actor. Here is a juicy bit for an actor who meets on stage people from his early days on the East Side of New York and also people from the other side of the tracks. Whatever his faults as a dramatist, Mr. Rice has an abiding sense of the melodramatic. That gift leavened with a touch of comedy has served him well in the theater. In "Counsellor-at-Law" both these gifts are brought heavily into play.

Even when some of the situations show signs of time-weariness, there is the saving grace of laughter or pointed lines to pick up the action. Muni is never at a loss to catch the significance of the lines. Indeed, unless the play served as vehicle to bring him back to Broadway, which Mr. Golden announces as his own intention, there would be little cause for the revival.

* * *

George Simon is about to face disbarment because of a fake alibi presented several years before he achieves fame. By means of a faithful scout he manages to get enough on his enemy to halt the disbarment proceedings. In the meantime he finds that his upper class wife is not faithful, but he returns to his work, which he discovers means more to him than his wife.

* *

The character vehicle is not without its satellite characters. Clara Langsner and Jennie Moscowitz add immeasurably to the atmosphere of the play in the roles of old-fashioned mothers. The sting has gone out of the indictment of the capitalist system made by Mr. Rice's strongest protagonist, Harry Becker, a Communist, who is beaten by the police. Joseph Pevney manages to get the most out this role despite its being outmoded. Mr. Golden has done a good job and maybe a successful one.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 25, 1942

Paul Muni Is Starred In Counsellor-at-Law

By BURTON RASCOE

AFTER a lapse of 10 years, Paul Muni returned last night to the role he created in Elmer Rice's Counsellor-at-Law in a revival at the Royale under the auspices of John Golden, producer of the original version of the play. It is the role which "made" Mr. Muni and started him on his successful Hollywood career. Supported by an excellent cast and ably directed by Mr. Rice himself, Mr. Muni last night submerged himself more successfully in his part than in anything I have ever seen him do.

I purposely refrained from checking on the original script to see what changes Mr. Rice had made, for I held that the current performance should be judged on its own merits; but now I wish I had checked (never mind, I will, later on), for Mr. Rice now dates his play as of "Spring, 1939"; he has interpolated some topical references which could not have been in the original; and it would seem as if he must have also changed the emphasis in certain directions in such a way as to destroy the whole concept of the original and to substitute a new one, leading to a denouement that struck me as being anticlimactic and vaguely disturbing.

* * *

A Triumph of Legal Cleverness

If I remember correctly (and, in this instance, I doubt if I do) the counsellor in the original play was, throughout, the object of Mr. Rice's bitter condemnation for his "betrayal of his class"; for that was in 1931-32 when Communism was fashionable among the richer playwrights, novelists, critics and Hollywood script writers and Mr. Rice was deeply concerned with the "class struggle." The counsellor, then (again, if I remember rightly), was pretty much the same lawyer as the one portrayed by Mr. Muni last night, but he was redeemed to "his own class" (the poor) by the love of a secretary who stuck by him in his impending disgrace.

Last night Mr. Muni ended up as a mere triumphant figure of legal cleverness, gloating over the fact that, just as he is saved by his secretary from jumping out of the window because his wife had deserted him in his hour of trial for another man, the rich and powerful director of a big steel corporation has been forced at last to come to him to defend his worthless son against a charge of wife-murder. As the curtain is about to descend, Mr. Muni has forgotten all about his wife, his suicidal impulse and even, indeed, his faithful secretary, and is smacking his lips and smiting his palms over the eminence of his client, the sensation the case promises to be, and the size of the fee in prospect.

* * *

So Nice Up Until Then, Too

And up until that time, Mr. Muni had been such a nice man, too. Brought up as a child of poor immigrants among the tenements he has struggled to the top as the city's foremost criminal lawyer and as a powerful politician; and yet he had remembered all his old friends among the poor of his boyhood days, getting them out of legal scrapes without fee, and bestowing upon them other acts of charity and benevolence. He has obtained his eminence by his great cleverness as a trial lawyer capable of swaying any jury in the clearest cases of manifest murder; and his fees are not only very high to those who can afford it but subject to his jacking them up without scrupie, above the stipulated sum, to meet any current losses he sustains by his charities. But his legal record is pure (technically) except for an indiscretion wherein he framed an alibi to save a poor boy from a life sentence as a fourth offender (and reformed the boy)—and this indiscretion is about to be used to "get" him by a socially prominent "New Englander" who is head of the trial board of the Bar Assn. and whom Mr. Muni has worsted in many trials.

Mr. Muni defeats the machinations of the "New Englander" when a private detective in his employ gets the goods on him that he is leading a double life. He has to come to Mr. Muni to plead for mercy, and agrees, of course, to drop the disbarment proceedings. The moral gets vague from there on.

Nevertheless the play is intensely interesting and it moves without a hitch through nine extremely clever scenes in which Mr. Rice shows himself to be not only one of the best craftsmen in the playwriting art but also a resourceful director. The large cast was almost flawless and Jennie Moscowitz and Ann Thomas scored high honors in marvelous characterizations. Miss Thomas particularly as the gabby telephone operator, although I could have wished that some members of the audience last night had known that, when Miss Thomas betrays her predicament to them in one scene, the occasion is for tears (if anything) and not for laughter.

"Counsellor-at-Law"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
November 25, 1942

Paul Muni Gives Richer Performance in Fine Revival Of Elmer Rice's Play

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH the playgoers usually groan at revivals and the critics compare performances with stingy care and patient regret I have here to report a play which, as revived last night, seemed better than it did the first time. It is Elmer Rice's "Counsellor at Law," at the Royale Theatre, with Paul Muni giving an even richer and deeper characterization than he did on the opening night, Nov. 6, 1931. It is not only worth seeing; it is worth seeing again.

This is not to be taken exactly as an argument against hasty reviewing, or proof that any critic ought to wait 11 years before writing about a new play. Some of the things which seemed defects then are there still, but either they or I have been shaken down and the play seemed to move faster, without wasting time over details. Beyond the alteration of such plainly out-of-date matters as going to Europe on a pleasure trip I could detect no important changes in the script itself.

Central Portrait

Its biggest interest is now and always has been the central portrait of George Simon, a big lawyer who came up the hard way, off an immigration boat and up the East Side, to make himself a dominant figure of the town, celebrated as much for his kindness as for his honesty and brilliance, as much for his shrewdness in murder defense as in the subtler affairs of divorce.

Both his background and his achievement have for years galled Francis Clark Baird, the stately, blue-blooded and fastidious lawyer who resents everything about George Simon, but especially his success in the courts. The play's main plot revolves around Mr. Baird's happy discovery of a way of getting the great Simon disbarred for a minor and technical wrong committed in a worthy cause, and its even happier conclusion comes when Mr. Simon fixes up a bigger and better trap for Mr. Baird, so that they call it quits.

While this may sound trivial and contrived it is enormously enhanced by the playing of the chief character. I suspect that one thing which gives the play the impression of greater movement and interest is that Mr. Muni's performance seems simpler and more direct, more natural anl unembellished. It has sympathy, warmth and steady fascination.

Fine Performance

Since Mr. Rice has lavished most of his care on this portrait the other characters are somewhat sketchy and flatly black or white. The social snob married to George Simon is unbelievably one-dimensional, and while the great lawyer's pretty and doting secretary is warmly drawn the other office characters and George's mama (still played graciously by Jennie Moscowitz) are out of the stock bin.

Most of the players Mr. Golden has assembled for the revival give admirable account of themselves, and while Ann Thomas is good as the 'phone girl, Constance McKay's performance of that role in 1931, is unforgettable.

It is worth noting, I suppose, that the one serious social criticism in the play, which comes with the young radical's bitter arraignment of George Simon as a traitor to his class, produced last night only uproarious laughter. It didn't seem funny in the apple-vending year of 1931 and it is difficult to see why it is funny now.

Maybe the new generation of playgoers Mr. Golden says he has revived the play for has a curious sense of humor. In any case we have them to thank for the resurrection of a one-time hit which seems as alive as ever.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 25, 1942

'Counsellor-at-Law' Revived To Repeat Its First Success

"Counsellor-at-Law," drama by Elmer Rice. Revived at the Royale Theatre, New York, Nov. 24, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

FOR our personal satisfaction, John Golden is a year late in reviving Elmer Rice's "Counsellor-at-Law" at the Royale. If he had thought of it last season, when good dramas were as scarce as ear trumpets at a Christian Science church service, it would have helped a lot.

Of course, there is an answer to that. Paul Muni couldn't play the hero last season. He was either tied up in Hollywood, or fussing with "Yesterday's Magic" for the Guild.

Anyway, the revival was achieved last night, and the result is practically as stimulating as it was 11 years ago when Mr. Rice's drama was an overnight success at the Plymouth Theatre.

On its first run it continued, you may recall, for a total of 412 performances altogether. Muni played the hero the better part of a year. Then Otto Kruger took over, while Paul was making pictures. Muni came back for another spell.

Hollywood Error

John Barrymore was selected for the screen assignment, which is one of those Hollywood blunders it is kinder to forget.

"Counsellor-at-Law" is, it seems to me, a shade refined in this revival, as compared with the original production. Mr. Muni has added a certain polish to his technical equipment. He is a finer character actor undoubtedly because of his 11 years' growth and his many screen triumphs. But George Simon loses a little something of the rugged force, the completely natural reversions to type, that Muni gave him when first he created the role.

The outburst of exultation following that of animal anger suffered by the discouraged East Side boy who had lifted himself to a place of standing among the elect of the bar, when he faces defeat at the hands of his snobbish enemies, did not seem quite as electrifying last night as it used to seem.

But it still is one of the most satisfying dramatic scenes that Elmer Rice has written into any of his dramas. And it is still a thrill to sit with and listen to an audience react to it.

Basically it is the old thrill of the happy ending. Honest George Simon, the boy who made good, is about to be beaten by a shyster lawyer trick he had played as a good-hearted young practitioner on his way up.

At the point where he is completely down and is considering a suicide jump, things begin to turn in his favor. He discovers the shady past of his most powerful enemy. And are his sympathetic auditors happy! The theatre fairly vibrates with their eagerness to be with their idol at the kill.

Good Acting

There probably never has been a more perfect joining of stage character and actor personality than this one that brings Muni and George Simon together. All the pointed by-play, all the intimate scenes—with the doting mother (again beautifully played by Jennie Moskowitz); with the scape-grace brother; with the defiant Communist; with the office boys and girls; with the gentle wife—are beautifully realized.

The support is again excellent, and the author's staging as perfect as could be asked. This includes, in addition to Mrs. Moscowitz, Joan Wetmore, a most aristocratic wife; Olive Deering, a less typically racial secretary than Anna Constant was originally; Ann Thomas, an equally chatty and amusing telephone girl; Jack Sheehan, who makes a triumph of the build-up for the third-act climax, Joseph Pevney, the wild young Communist, and so on through the list.

Raymond Sovey settings are attractive. Last night's audience of Muni fans was delighted. "Counsellor-at-Law" is one of the few dramas that is exciting enough to stand two visits.

THE NEW YORK SUN
November 25, 1942

Rice's 'Counsellor-at-Law' Is Revived at the Royale Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FEW things are precisely what they were in 1931 and Elmer Rice's "Counsellor-at-Law," having been a highly contemporary play eleven years ago, is not among them. Revived last evening at the Royale Theater, Mr. Rice's drama proved more leisurely than it had been in memory, less tense in drama and more casual in comedy. But if it is not quite what it used to be, it is still an abundant and satisfying play.

John Golden has recalled Paul Muni to play the role he created and has reinforced the cast with several others who played in it when "Counselor-at-Law" was young. Mr. Muni is again George Simon, the boy from Second avenue who made spectacularly good as a criminal lawyer and married a trivial lady of the bluest blood—one of those trivial aristocrats which Mr. Rice used so to enjoy pummeling. Mr. Muni is again suave and tempestuous by turn, impatient and astute and in bad trouble. Mr. Muni's Mr. Simon was almost disbarred, you may recall, for a buried transgression and he almost jumped out of a high window when his wife went off with one of her own faintly improbable kind. But Mr. Simon went back to work instead.

I doubt that we need take all this as seriously as we did in 1931, or that either Mr. Muni or Mr. Rice troubles too. Mr. Rice, for example, calls his play a comedy now, although he used to think of it as drama. Mr. Muni does not play the central role as if he really expected to jump out of the window.

But enough excitement remains in the latter scenes of the play to supply drama's tingle. And the Rice character touches, which were never more numerous or more sharply written than in "Counsellor-at-Law," still highly season the play. Perhaps now, more than ever, these touches are the play—these sharply etched characters who people the drama. The telephone girl and the office boy, the wistful young lawyer and the swaggering law clerk, the bedraggled stenographer on her endless promenades, Simon's old mother, the reformed petty crook, the "little man" and the "large man"—these are the people who expand the play and give it substance. They haven't changed in eleven years. Mr. Rice was right about them the first time and they are enduring.

Mr. Muni, after a little uncertainty, plays his part generously and well; Olive Deering acts perceptively in the role of the lawyer's secretary and admirer; Jennie Moscowitz is back to play the part of Simon's mother with sharp understanding; Sam Bonnell has his old role as Simon's partner and again is good in it. Not all the others are all they might be, but Jack Sheehan is an actor to prize in the role of McFadden. Ann Thomas is a fine Bessie and Joan Wetmore struggles bravely against an author's contempt in the unrewarding part of Mrs. Simon.

There are ups and downs in "Counsellor-at-Law" and perhaps the downs are more evident than they once were. But now, as in 1931, the ups have it—and by a wide margin, too.

"Yankee Point"

NEW YORK POST
November 24, 1942

"Yankee Point" Brings the War to Our Eastern Coast

By WILELLA WALDORF

ALTHOUGH "Yankee Point" involves the capture of a German spy just off a U-boat and winds up with a Nazi air raid on our Eastern Coast, it is one of the most placid plays of the season so far.

Gladys Hurlbut, who wrote it, admires the Yankee spirit when it comes to seeing things through, and she is chiefly concerned with the Adams family who live on the ocean-front. Mrs. Adams, cool and business-like, is chief observer at the airplane spotting post, which happens to be located in her own summer house, while Mr. Adams, a gentlemanly English professor and veteran of the last war, has just found himself in uniform again and is on the verge of leaving for foreign parts.

Everybody but Miz Bekins, the old family nurse who is inclined to have "spells," faces the imminent departure of Captain Adams with a determined chin-up, stiff-upper-lip attitude. The discovery of a Nazi uniform and a quantity of dynamite buried in the sand is likewise accepted with jaunty efficiency in the neighborhood, and Miss Hurlbut has a bit of fun when the ladies of the observation post, loyal to the Army Fighter Command, are not inclined to follow the orders of the Coast Guard in the emergency, but insist upon carrying on their spotting activities no matter how many spies may be lurking in the vicinity.

Stock Figures Seldom Come to Life

Miss Hurlbut writes natural and amusing lines for some of her actors to speak, notably her "character" people, but she has only faintly outlined the leading figures, with the result that her play is never very moving. Mrs. Adams, a colorlessly written role, never quite comes to life in Edna Best's ladylike, imperturbably British, performance, but the author is chiefly at fault. Suddenly in the second act, Mrs. Adams becomes a different person, quite flip in speaking to the Coast Guard officer, something she never was before nor afterward. It is hard to blame Miss Best for seeming a trifle baffled by it all.

John Cromwell, who also directed the production in well-bred, leisurely fashion, is a bit more successful as Captain Adams, off to the wars again despite the fact that he came out of the last one embittered and vowing never to fight again. But his role, too, is little more than a rather vague impression of the noble American husband and father.

Young K. T. Stevens as the rebellious daughter who takes her dad's early preachments against war seriously and is inclined to resent the fact that the elders have dragged her and her generation into another conflict, sounded as if she might provide some fireworks while other people were discussing her, but as soon as she arrived on the scene, she promptly wilted into tears and spent the rest of the evening being that stock figure, the-young-girl-who-is-going-to-have-a-baby. The role had no particular distinction and Miss Stevens was unable to do very much for it as the evening wore on.

Character People Have the Best of It

The most stimulating passages in "Yankee Point" are not the somewhat lugubrious speeches in which Miss Hurlbut waxes rather hammy about America and the war, but the pungent cracks uttered from time to time by Elizabeth Patterson as the old housekeeper and Arthur Aylsworth as Uncle Pete, a neighborhood character.

"This war's dug up places nobody but missionaries ever heard of," sniffs Miz Bekins during one of her periodic "spells," while Uncle Pete speaks authoritatively about the situation in Washington: "Wilson's a good man!"

Another of Miss Hurlbut's more refreshing characters is the younger daughter of the house, who has just decided to marry Butch, a flying cadet in Texas. Dorothy Gilchrist gives a delightful performance in this part.

If more of Miss Hurlbut's characters were as real as Miz Bekins, Uncle Peter and Young Jeremy Adams, "Yankee Point" might have proved to be a far more vigorous play than it did last night. But most of its people are cardboard figures, and not even a German air raid on our own shores manages to provide much excitement.

NEW YORK TIMES
November 24, 1942

'Yankee Point,' Miss Hurlbut's Play Which Tells of the People Who Stay at Home

By LEWIS NICHOLS

OUT of the landing last Summer on Long Island of a group of luckily unfortunate saboteurs, Gladys Hurlbut had taken the idea of a play about the people who stay here at home. In "Yankee Point," which Edward Choate and Marie Louise Elkins offered last evening at the Longacre, she is writing of the wives and families of the men who are in the service, and of civilian defense, especially of the aircraft observation posts, where tens of thousands of people serve through the cold and rain, feeling now and then a little ridiculous but always on hand for their appointed hours. Credit Miss Hurlbut with the best of intentions, and sometimes with something more, but hers probably is not the final play to be written on a subject that in its humble way has a touch of nobility.

Perhaps the difficulty with "Yankee Point" is that it scatters its shot like the shrapnel the observation posts are prepared to touch off at any minute. It does not fully go into those long, dreary hours when nothing happens save the whine of wind through the trees; it does not do so because the drama requires action, and that requirement suggests the capture of a German spy beneath the dunes of Long Island. Drama also suggests the departure into active service of a teacher who always had opposed war and his discussions of his duty with his children and with his wife, and, while some of it is effective, it slows down the action, making three themes to carry on in three different directions.

* * *

Miss Hurlbut is telling a story of the Adams family, which lives along the coast and so would be the first port of call from the gentlemen across the way. Bob Adams, the father, is about to go into the service, he is afraid in a desk job at Washington. Mary Adams is the commanding officer of the observation tower, and as such it is she who must compete with the whims of observers and all those other misfortunes to personnel to which chief observers are subject at all times, more especially now that the Winter winds are coming on.

One of the observers finds a buried coat, its collar indubitably German, and a box lying under it in the sands. Instead of using the telephone to call the army, which observers present at the Longacre last evening thought would have been the correct procedure, she sent for the Coast Guard, which unquestionably was a help for the play. For a couple of their men were present when the spy was flushed from his hiding place and it was they who took him away before he could do much damage and after he had given a hint there would be an air raid. The third act is taken up mainly by the raid, which on for it as the evening wore on.

* * *

Edna Best is the mother who watches over her husband and children, as well as the post, with a serene air of almost unconcern. Probably it is too serene an air, for if all the things that went on at the station at Yankee Point went on at the station manned elsewhere by Maxwell Anderson, in the flesh, that worthy would have material for enough excitement to keep Broadway tense for a year. John Cromwell, who also directed, plays the father with an amiable charm and Dorothy Gilchrist and K. T. Stevens are the two children.

Something should be said about the family retainers of the Adams family. They are an old nurse and an old man about the beach, and they are respectively Elizabeth Patterson and Arthur Aylesworth. Both are excellent, the former as an old lady who is sure she is about to die—until trouble sets in—and it is she who has a line which is heartfelt: "This war's dug up places nobody except missionaries ever heard of." And Mr. Aylesworth, as a dim, unshaven warrior of the past, sums up beautifully one conception of the whole state of German-American relations for decades: "We'll beat 'em. Wilson's a good man."

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 24, 1942

War Poster Drama

By HOWARD BARNES

"YANKEE POINT" is as topical as a movie. Gladys Hurlbut, who wrote the new Longacre Theatre offering, has had her eye on the headlines. She has looked beyond them to envisage an air raid on the Eastern sea coast. There are moments of incisive human drama, as a normal family group gets swept into the war on a series of fronts. Unfortunately, the play wavers between martial pyrotechnics and an account of brave, disturbed people facing a crisis. In the doing it bogs down rather badly.

It is not that the author has been in want of striking material. On the one hand she has reconstructed a German spy hunt, which follows facts with extreme fidelity. On the other she has shown a typical American clan, throwing all of its weight into the war. Where "Yankee Point" is disappointing and inconclusive is in the author's failure to settle for one approach or the other to her drama. What might have been a showy dramatization of news stories or a compassionate study of little people at war winds up by being neither.

* * *

It is not for lack of deft staging and honest acting. John Cromwell, who has fructified both the theater and the screen on more than one occasion, has built up whatever intensity he could muster from the script. He has gone farther, by contributing a singularly sympathetic portrayal of a father and husband, going off to his second world war, unable to protect his family from the threat of immediate conflict. Edna Best brings her fine artistry to the role of the wife and mother, in charge of an observation post and there are excellent minor performances.

For all of its stanch direction and playing, "Yankee Point" remains a rather blurred poster of the present. The action quickens perceptibly half way through the show, when a Nazi saboteur is caught by the dauntless citizens on the home front and turned over to the Coast Guard. It takes on moving aspects when the head of the house leaves for service overseas. It has its comic moments when the family retainers put in their two cents worth on the doings. What is missing is sustained dramatic eloquence and a straightaway approach to the subject matter.

* * *

The final act, for example, with its climax coming in the midst of a supposed German air raid, negates the documentary authority of the spy capture. The muddled relationship of father and daughter, in a scene which quite eluded me, merely impedes the momentum of the production. In any case, there is good acting to be seen, by Elizabeth Patterson, Arthur Aylesworth, Ann Dere and K. T. Stevens, as well as Cromwell and Miss Best. And the sets of Frederick Fox are first rate. Call "Yankee Point" a war play which just doesn't come off.

"Yankee Point"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 24, 1942

'Yankee Point' Drops Bombs and Saboteurs on Long Island Family

"Yankee Point," comedy by Gladys Hurlbut. Produced by Edward Choate and Marie Louise Elkins at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Nov. 23, 1942.

* * *

By BURNS MANTLE

GLADYS HURLBUT pushed us a little farther into the war with "Yankee Point" last night by dropping a German bomb on Long Island, somewhere near the spot where the saboteurs tried to cache their dynamite last Spring.

But she softened the shock by dropping a lot of healthy laughter into her text before she came to the bomb. This makes her play a sort of honey war comedy.

"Yankee Point" revolves amusingly and emotionally around as decent an American family as the one Rose Franken writes about in "Claudia."

Plays about American households that are forced to take the war in stride and are able to come through the adventure with credit, as well as wound stripes, are pretty moving to me these days.

Especially when they are as wisely cast and well played as this one is. Good influences, too, I think. It is an old Yankee custom in the theatre for audiences to translate themselves into the characters of the lightly heroic drama.

We're Like That

A naive custom, and perhaps a little childish, but a good one to play with when tests of a sensible sort of courage may come with the best air raid alarm.

The Bob Adamses are living on an exposed point of the Eastern seaboard. Mary Adams is a defense warden. She and her more active neighbors sit up in the old boathouse and report the passing of airplanes.

Bob, her husband, who came through the last war with bitterness in his heart, has recovered his grip and joined on for a desk job in Washington. Dorothy, the youngest daughter, is having a time getting herself married to an aviator stationed in Texas. Sandy, her sister, is struggling with the pacifism stirred in her by her peace-preaching parent when she was younger; also with pregnancy and a husband heading for the draft.

The family comedy is sharpened by the protestations of a hypochondriac nurse and such neighbors as add to it naturally. The drama takes on theatrical color with the discovery of a German spy hiding in the old wreck beached right there at the Adams boat house.

Finally there are the domestic tragedies concerned with the departure of papa for the wars and the loyal resolutions of those left at home. These are topped by the additionally dramatic token air raid that sends the family scurrying under tables and listening excitedly to radio instructions.

Comes the Alert

"Yankee Point" would probably have been a little more poignant in story without the final bombing. But, as I say, bombings are good things to anticipate right now. Citizen minds should be prepared for possible eventualities.

Edna Best comes back from the coast to play Mary, and Miss Best, if you recall her, is about as appealing a home body as the stage knows. She puts on age with dignity, and retains a youthful sweetness that has always been her greatest asset.

John Cromwell, who used to stage and act in plays for Producer Brady years back, returns to the stage to play husband Adams. He did not intend to, but Dean Jaggers left the cast a few weeks ago, and someone had to take on the role. The Cromwell performance is sturdy and human.

Elizabeth Patterson, the well beloved interpreter of Yankee spinsters, is also back from Hollywood to play the spartan complainer, and that's a blessing of the season.

The daughters are attractively played by K. T. Stevens and Dorothy Gilchrist, and Arthur Aylesworth adds a bit of shotgun comedy that gets results.

There are two nice settings by Frederick Fox. Last night's audience was happy and sad at the author's bidding, and full of rewarding applause at the play's end.

'YANKEE POINT'

A play in three acts by Gladys Huribut; staged by John Cromwell; settings by Frederick Fox; presented at the Longacre Theater on November 23, 1942, by Edward Choate and Marie Louise Elkins. The cast:

Miz Bekins	Elizabeth Patterson
Jeremy Adams	Dorothy Gilchrist
Bob Adams	John Cromwell
Mary Adams	Edna Best
Doctor Nickerson	James Todd
Miss Higgins	Ann Dere
Ruth Lapo	Margaret Mullen
Warrant Officer Trueman	Donald McClelland
Coast Guard	John Forsythe
Sandy Martin	K. T. Stevens
Uncle Pete	Arthur Aylsworth
George Finch	Richard Rudi
McTavish	Talley

NEW YORK SUN
November 24, 1942

'Yankee Point,' War Melodrama, Opens at The Longacre Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

GLADYS HURLBUT has a warm feeling for people and can make characters talk and act like men and women and hence there are many excellent things in her "Yankee Point," which opened at the Longacre last evening. There are friendly jokes and touching passages; even when they are tossed ruthlessly into incongruous situations, Miss Hurlbut's people keep the human touch. They deserve better than the unconvincing melodrama which surrounds them.

Miss Hurlburt has set about to write a war play which will involve pleasant Americans living near the ocean on the Eastern coast. Mr. and Mrs. Adams are middle-aged and devoted; he is going to the middle-aged's kind of war. One of his daughters is bitter about the war, but learns to accept it; another is, if the telephone will only ring, ready to accept a boy who is learning to fly. The ancient family nurse is comically complaining at the start, but heroic toward the end. These, and the others who cross their paths in the early scenes, are living a comfortable, interesting and not too exciting life when the author picks them up. Their problems are the human ones—bewilderment and grief at parting, uncertainty about the future and nostalgic memories of the past.

It is demanded in the drama that more shall happen, and this Miss Hurlbut knows, possibly too well. So in the second act they catch a spy and in the third act they undergo an air raid—a real air raid, with falling bombs, searchlights and everything. The mother is an airplane spotter and comes into her own. Everybody rises to the occasion, including the men back stage with the sound effects. Miss Hurlbut proves that airplane spotters are important and will do a good job when the time comes and that sturdy old people as well as tender young ones will carry on.

And what happens is plausible enough. It is merely not in the least convincing. It is somehow too pat; it is somehow too easy. The bombs are not going to hit any of these nice people or knock down the attractive house the scene designer, Frederick Fox, has built for them. The United States is not being invaded; the Adams family is being provided with a romantic opportunity to show that their hearts are in the right places. The people remain as real as possible under the circumstances, but the circumstances seem to me flagrantly unacceptable. I'm afraid that air invasion, when and if it comes, is not going to be nearly so well-bred as Miss Hurlbut imagines. It's apt to be more than pretty searchlight effects and attractive young women being chipper as anything under a card table.

The cast does everything a cast can do. Miss Edna Best and John Cromwell are movingly convincing as the devoted couple; Dorothy Gilchrist is coltishly amusing as their younger daughter, and K. T. Stevens is sensitively attractive as the bitter girl. Elizabeth Patterson is pretty marvelous as the old nurse. These, with the rest, make the most of the good things in "Yankee Point." But too much of "Yankee Point" is just plot which the author pulled out of her hat. Or maybe out of her files.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 24, 1942

A Yankee Family Faces the War

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

INTO the period of a single day, and into the life of a single family, Gladys Hurlbut has squeezed a good many phenomena of America at war. For good measure, she has topped off *Yankee Point* with one further thing that happily has not yet come to pass: an air raid involving Nazi bombers off the Atlantic coast. The result is itself a kind of phenomenon of America at war—a type of popular playwrighting that will probably become more frequent as time goes on.

Artistically, there is nothing to say about *Yankee Point*. It does not transmute; it transcribes. It exists as a paste-up of things we see around us, or of things we read about in the newspaper. To create a picture, it offers us a middle-aged husband who gives up school-teaching to go back to the Army he served during the World War I; a wife who is an airplane spotter at a lonely point on the Atlantic; a daughter who is still perturbed by the pacifism her father taught her during the years of peace; another daughter who is going to marry a youngster in the Air Force. To provide a plot, *Yankee Point* tells of the discovery of a Nazi uniform hidden in the dunes, and of the capture of the spy who had hidden it—forerunners of the air raid that puts the courage and convictions of the family to the touch.

Keeping to her popular formula, Miss Hurlbut has not gone about all this too grimly. Whenever the picture begins to turn dark, she has quickly brightened it with humor. The 84-year-old family retainer with her aches and pains, the grizzled old salt who thinks Woodrow Wilson is still President, the tough and tweedy old maid who keeps a lookout—all these are kept within easy hailing distance. Even when the planes are thundering overhead, the old nurse raises a ready laugh in the living room.

In a way it's pointless to bring any critical standards to bear on *Yankee Point*. Doubtless its heart is in the right place. It passes an evening. It touches on things that have genuine meaning these days. But it barely touches on them. It moves from one situation to another, from one emotion to another, with inescapable glibness; and it creates, when you have had even half an hour to think about it, an effect of undoubted banality. Perhaps all this doesn't matter too much in any single play. The real danger lies in the possibility of there being a whole succession of them. The war, somehow, doesn't merit such stock and shallow handling.

As the wife, Edna Best plays with skill and sympathy; as the husband, John Cromwell is properly sturdy. Elizabeth Patterson gives relish to the part of the old nurse; and Arthur Aylsworth is excellent as the grizzled villager. Mr. Cromwell's direction seems loose and lacking in taste.